

# School Choice Annual Conference Education 2025: Student First!

Friday, December 20, 2013  
India International Centre, New Delhi

## Compendium of Proceedings

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Contents:

1. Introduction: Education 2025 – Student First!
2. Opening remarks: Baishali Bomjan
3. Inaugural address: Ankur Shah
4. Vision 2025: Changing the Paradigms of Education: Kalp Patel and Advait Shroff, Maya Menon, Ajith Basu with Premila Nazareth
5. Practice 2025: Teaching for Understanding – Umesh Brahme, Ashish Rajpal, Vibha Parthasarathy, Isabel Sutcliffe with Meeta Sengupta
6. Action Plan 2025: Rethinking Policy – Karthik Muralidharan, Ramya Venkataraman, Amit Kaushik with Shekhar Shah
7. Closing remarks: Harsh Shrivastava
8. Dinner talk: Ashish Dhawan with Amitav Virmani

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Introduction:

Centre for Civil Society (CCS) held the fifth annual School Choice National Conference (SCNC) on December 20, 2013 at New Delhi. The one-day conference, which is also the biggest event on education in the CCS calendar, saw over 150 representatives from different schools of thought – including students, educators and educationists, delegates from the government and non-government organizations, CSR professionals, investors, edupreneurs and service providers – from across India came together to discuss the future of India's education.

Aptly themed 'Education 2025: Student First!', SCNC 2013 discussed the vision, practice and action plan for India's education in 2025 through three sessions titled *Changing the Paradigms of Education*, *Teaching for Understanding* and *Rethinking Policy*. A dynamic mix of speakers including policy makers and influencers, budding and veteran education practitioners, researchers and grassroots workers made the discussions rich in context and content.

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Opening remarks

SCNC 2013 opened with welcome remarks by **Baishali Bomjan** from CCS. She took the audience through a brief history of CCS and SCNC, and explained the mission statement of CCS – '*Social change through public policy*' – as it goes from policy change to practice. While touring through the growth of SCNC over the past half a decade, she mentioned that the Conference has brought together leaders in the education space and strongly promoted the right to education of choice.

Baishali also asked the delegates to put together their thoughts and vision for education 2025, before the Conference formally began.

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## Inaugural address

Ankur Shah from CCS' Board of Advisors delivered the inaugural address. He said, "We have come a long way through SCNC. The Conference has significantly helped CCS transform from an organization promoting vouchers in school education to a major public policy think-tank advocating competition and choice in education."

Citing findings from Karthik Muralidharan's research in Andhra Pradesh, Ankur mentioned that 2013 has been an important year for research. He quoted data from Karthik's research and emphasized that learning outcomes are related to school choice. Ankur also made a mention about the role of contract teachers, who have done well towards improving student learning outcomes during the entire course of this study.

In the later part of his presentation, Ankur shared the work of CCS' National Independent Schools Alliance (NISA) with partner organizations (STIR and EI). He also talked about other aspects of CCS' work including the School Voucher Programme, Minority Scholarships (with Tarraqi Foundation), Case Studies on Inclusive Education and the Vikalp Skill Voucher Programme (in partnership with National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Michael and Susan Dell Foundation (MSDF), Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute (BARTI), Department of Social Justice (Government of Maharashtra) and India Development Foundation (IDF)).

Ankur also talked about the Right to Education (RTE) Platform and the K-12 Data Portal, which are open source knowledge resources on education in India.

Following a quick mention to the School Choice Campaign (SCC) goals for 2014 and an introduction to the CCS team, Ankur invited the panelists for the first session – *Vision 2025: Changing the paradigms of education*.

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Session 1

### *Vision 2025 – Changing the paradigms of education*

The first session aimed at exploring the vision of education that leaders hold for the future and asking some critical questions – what kind of education should we impart, who should do it and how? The panelists for this session were Kalp Patel and Advait Shroff (students from Riverside School), Ajith Basu (from Agastya International Foundation) and Maya Menon (from Teacher Foundation), keenly moderated by Premila Nazareth from CCS' Board of Trustees.

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In the true spirit of *Student First!*, SCNC 2013 handed over the stage to students to share their idea of education in the future. As two students from Riverside School – Advait Shroff (grade 10, interested in football) and Kalp Patel (grade 11, interested in design) – took the stage to share some experiences that they had gone through, they expressed the desire to co-create and co-design their own education.

"Student First! is very sacred to us", said the students, as they shared some remarkable real life examples captured in videos by them. For example, while the short film titled 'Chai Kitli' explained the relevance of business studies in the real world and how learning could be made interesting by a different design, another captioned 'Artist in Residence' emphasized upon the need to celebrate competencies (and not competition) and how introverted people could also take the stage and get highlighted. Similarly, another presentation on sports highlighted values like treating everyone as an equal, having a chance to give feedback to mentors so that they are also held accountable, and ensuring that the strongest, fittest and the fastest live by a moral responsibility of including peers.

The students also questioned the non-existence of any marks for empathy, compassion and consideration in the existing education system through a presentation titled 'Heal', and urged for an education that could transform students from being passive bystanders to being active, able citizens who want to change things around (citizenship first).

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Following these powerful videos by the boys, **Ajith Basu** from Agastya International Foundation (AIF) presented his ideas on education 2025, beginning with a comparison between two routes of education – a theoretical minds-on way and a practical hands-on way. Quoting Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts on natural education, he emphasized that education of the future has to be minds-on plus hands-on. Ajith shared some of AIF's work as an example of sparking creativity in rural India through hands-on science education. Some innovative examples like *mobile labs*, *lab on a bike* and *lab in a box* were warmly received by the audience.

Ajith also argued the need for recycling skills within the system to make it sustainable. Through the story of a young girl called Uma, he showed how regular circulation and passing on of added values could make an independently working system. He also shared some examples of innovation fairs, where engineering students would come to mentor young school students on their projects. He argued that value-based education can't be given by classroom models alone.

Highlighting key issues in the India educational system, Ajith said, "It is uninspiring and based on rote learning which discourages creativity. There is very little hands-on methodology of teaching and learning, and a general lack of laboratories in schools is responsible for poor conceptual and practical understanding of subjects in classrooms." He also spoke about equipping teachers for better teaching and mentoring.

In his concluding note, Ajith drew a comparison between *thinking response* and *wholistic response* mechanisms, making a strong case. He said, "Thinking can't be linear in 2025, it has to be networked".

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"Whatever has got to do with teaching would eventually have something to do with education" – **Maya Menon** from Teacher Foundation, the third panelist for the session thus opened her presentation. She elaborately spoke on the subject "What's wrong with our teaching?" and held up *shortage of teachers*, *no or inadequate training* and *a systemic absence of vision, purpose and urgency* as the key reasons behind the

Maya showed a video which clearly demonstrated the harm that rote learning is doing to the overall education in India. She explained how the guru-shishya parampara-born 'spray and pray system' of education – where you spray a lot of information on students and pray that it sticks – is a clear threat to the future of students. Emphasizing what the teacher 'believes and does' in the classroom is what matters, she paraphrased Martin Luther King's famous '*I have a dream*' speech into the context of teaching and learning in Indian classrooms.

Maya made some thought provoking suggestions on strategy. She put forward the idea of National and State Consortium of Teacher Leaders (N/SCTL), preferably not made up of bureaucrats. She also explained her concept of executive teachers (5000-10000 of) who will form these Consortia and build up a professional cadre of master teachers. Further, Maya advocated in favor of delinking teacher training from awarding of qualified teacher status, and supported better, broader teacher eligibility tests (TETs) and regular portfolio reviews by local panels.

She concluded saying, "The world becomes what we teach. Teachers have an amazing power to do the right thing. And, good teaching happens when there is rigorous teacher preparation and selection and there are well-defined career pathways for teachers". Maya strongly called upon the best teachers to stay on in teaching, and lead from the classroom.

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Summarizing the first session of the day, Premila brought a pertinent question to the forum – "We are talking about education and skills separately. Why are we not marrying the two?" As she referred to a slide titled '*Employment Shares and Labour Productivity Differentials across Sectors*' from the Economic Survey, she opened the house for the audience. Several interesting questions and comments flowed in:

1. Comment: "It is high time we inculcate more moral values in our education system. It could help bring down crime as well." – participant from Haryana
2. Question: "How is Science taught at Agastya?" – Amir Abidi
  - a. "We invest in creating the correct setting for the child and developing teachers as facilitators and support ecosystems." – Ajith Basu

3. Question: "Can't we have a bank of videos in one place that could be accessible to all, which would share the best practices from all around?" – Parthasarathy
  - a. "Agastya has created a bank of almost 190 videos for the public space. Teacher Foundation also create such videos, but teachers don't have enough trust on themselves about doing it in the classroom.
4. Comment: "Can we conceive a teaching reality show – at the moment, there's no benchmark for what great teachers do. A teacher enters the classroom every day, but never gets to see how other teachers teach. One could have the best teachers of the country come live on the television and have experts to evaluate what they did well and what they didn't, and the entire country could vote." – K Satyanarayanan
5. Question: "How do we motivate young people to take up teaching?" – participant
  - a. "We have to make teaching look like a bright, interesting profession, and also make it sound exciting and young. To do this, we would also have to put the existing teachers in a position where they enjoy teaching and take pride in it." – Maya Menon
6. Question: "What role will technology play in education of the future? How do you see technology working in the future?" – participant from Kaivalya Education Foundation
  - a. "Technology is only going to be a supplement, and will not be able to replace teachers. A lot of our learning is based on research. Riverside hasn't disallowed us to use any gadget, as long as it is constructive. It is a widespread luxury and one should be exposed to it and try to bridge the gap between education and technology." – boys from Riverside School
  - b. "I really like the way I can reach out to my teachers at any point of time and they respond. It is strengthening communication, research and flow of information. For example, writing to BMW's design head to gather inputs on automobile design." – boys from Riverside School
  - c. "Teachers need to know how to use technology appropriately. We train teachers using as well as in technology for better teaching. Technology is great, and it is important to facilitate learning." – Maya Menon
7. Comment: "Teachers also need to be valued by the communities and parents that the children go to; being a teacher is as good as being a doctor or an engineer." – Ina Gulati from Tech Mahindra Foundation
  - a. "I totally agree. However, we can't demand respect, we have to command it. One has to hold their heads high first." – Maya Menon
  - b. "In Uttarakhand, every village person wants to be a teacher, but they require a degree in Education (B Ed/M Ed), for which they have to go to the town. We are not thinking strategically to unlock the system and have teachers from the village teaching within the village." – Premila Nazareth
8. Question: "What is the teacher doing in the classroom? Should teachers not be creating in students skills for life?" – Taruna Verma
  - a. "We would personally want our teachers to be approachable, friendly and attached to us. The relationship with teachers in our school is more like friends. But at one point, the student needs to explore his own possibilities, where the teacher is only going to be a facilitator." – boys from Riverside School
  - b. "Teachers teach the way they have been taught – they know they have to be student-centric, but they don't know how to bring it in practice." – Maya Menon
9. Comment: "We should also focus on the role of principals – most of the problem lies there. Teachers have been wanting to do better, but the principals have been stuck with some ideas, and they are not very keen to experiment and allow new initiatives." – participant
10. Comment: "Those were extremely good presentations, thank you for that! We really need some good training as well to run and administer schools." – Rajesh Malhotra from a budget private school in Delhi
11. Question: "There is always this trade-off between standardization and customization when we talk about teacher training. Where should we draw the line?" – Arvind Ilamaram from CCS
  - a. "Setting standards is about benchmarks; customization comes in but naturally in any teaching and learning environment. Standardization isn't appropriate when it comes to dealing with humans." – Maya Menon
  - b. "The standards for learning have been set long ago – in terms of the context, but there is always customization within every classroom." – boys from Riverside School

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Towards the end of the session, Baishali shared interesting ideas put together by the audience on their vision for education 2025. Of these, three ideas stood out:

1. "My vision for education 2025 is curious and critically thinking children. We would be teaching and learning by examples. For instance, using the Hiroshima example to teach historical, biological and geographical concepts." – Akanksha Bapna
2. "My vision for education 2025 is to ensure that each child in the country is exposed to a caring adult." – Nisha from Dream a Dream
3. "My vision for education 2025 is where children are enjoying and learning well in different environments, since learning is not always in the school, it is out of school as well." – Tarun Verma. Tarun made a drawing to aptly demonstrate his vision of education of the future.

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## Session 2

### Practice 2025 – Teaching for Understanding

The second session tried to look into the kind of pedagogy and infrastructure required to achieve the vision 2025 for education. It focused on innovative developments and best practices in education today – in the areas of curriculum setting, methods for student assessments, classroom innovations, teacher training, school financing models and alternative methods of imparting education – which will aid the movement of our education system towards this vision.

Education practitioner Meeta Sengupta moderated this session which had Umesh Brahme (from Room to Read), Ashish Rajpal (from iDiscoveri), eminent Indian educationist Vibha Parthasarathy and Isabel Sutcliffe (from Pearson India).

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The presentations and the following discussions in the second panel took the participants through a 4-step journey of learning how to read, discovering oneself, classroom teaching and learning within the school and finally, annualized learning cycles and assessments. Meeta Sengupta swiftly moderated the discussion on the future of education in eleven years from now.

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"As a child, I learnt to read by watching. Today, children live in an oral culture, where reading is getting depleted. 'How to read' must be inculcated in children as much as possible right from the early ages", said Umesh Brahme from Room to Read as she built upon some hard data on the ability of children in various grades to read basic texts. He argued that access to books (and thus an opportunity to read) is the first need if one wants to fix this issue. Umesh said, "Inculcating good reading habits is the first step towards teaching for understanding."

Umesh briefly talked about Room to Read's library movement in schools, where the organization has opened close to 7000 libraries across India to promote and develop a habit of reading among children through a print-rich environment. He mentioned that reading as a subject is almost non-existent in India, but languages are. Therefore, children learn by rote and teachers don't know how to develop reading habits inside a classroom.

Speaking about creating a natural interest in reading, Umesh said, "Reading is monotonous as long as it is not interactive. We need to create a naturally interesting environment where children are attracted to reading and eventually become fearless of words. Also, phonology of words and vocabulary are extremely important aspects related to reading."

He hinted upon the existing vicious circle that the Indian education system struggles with every day – children don't read and thus can't develop confidence in education, which is a part of the reason they don't complete school – and stressed upon the need to create lifelong, committed readers.

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"The recent work in education has been focusing on reporting about learning outcomes in children. Why do we have people with double Masters in Arts in Education who can't write a single two-paragraph letter to their mother in English?" – asked **Ashish Rajpal** as he began his talk on the journey of discovering oneself.

Building upon the importance of learning outcomes, Ashish tried to define the very basics of understanding by putting forward three pertinent points – one, can children in primary schools be given an opportunity to understand; two, are the children able to apply what they have learnt or understood, and three, are they able to express it in an organized manner (and communicate in English).

Ashish related understanding to application and expression. He argued, "Indians are very good when it comes to structured, routine work. However, whenever ambiguity, variety and new things come in, we struggle. We have been robbed off of our opportunities to do things – even educated, experienced people can't do basic things like fixing their own car, doing their own laundry and cutting their own grass."

"Even the poorest in India want their children to know English. Poorer classes are attached to the financial and economic dimension of the language, while the richer ones to its social and cultural dimension", said Ashish as he stressed upon the importance of communicating what is learnt.

Ashish spoke against scripted instructions – teaching guidelines and curricula – to teachers on how to teach well. He argued in favor of being given the provision to give a feedback to teachers and tell them if they are not teaching well. He also put forward an open question asking if it is possible, in the interest of scale, to have children at different levels to learn in different classrooms; against all the political and societal pressures. Lastly, he spoke briefly about school leadership and classroom management.

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"Our schools flaunt vision and mission statements with touching content and beautifully crafted lines, but the classroom dynamics and the reality leave us deeply distressed and depressed", said **Vibha Parthasarathy**, eminent Indian educationist and school leader, and the third panelist for the session.

She expressed gratitude and happiness in being connected with the SCNC and spoke about good schooling – teaching and learning. Vibha shared her experience of visiting scores of schools in rural India, and put together her ideas through a poem titled '*The Little Boy*'. She said that every school prescribes creative periods, which eventually kill creativity in children. She advocated against the system of seeking teachers' approvals for everything that children do, which eventually turn them into conformists who can't experiment and display their own thoughts and imaginations.

Vibha talked about a paradigm shift towards valuing an environment where an individual child is expressing himself. She said, "We teach in a particular way till we kill learning. There is a lot of repetition. We have in place all the things that safeguard a teacher – there is only one yardstick and the teacher doesn't have to make a judgement differentially". She stressed upon the need for contextualizing every lesson with the children's background. She shared a couple of examples to demonstrate the importance of contextual relevance in education – for example, customizing poems like '*Jack and Jill went up the hill*' and '*London Bridge is falling down*' to local flavors, and teaching alphabets in an interesting manner by way of old newspapers and magazines contrasted against the traditional methods.

She concluded with the need for teachers to also be able to unlearn and relearn, and emphasized that the teacher development programmes have to run hand-in-hand with the ongoing teaching and learning practices.

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What are the issues all nations seek to address in their education policies? Are there common trends emerging worldwide? What are the trends in curriculum development, assessment and pedagogy? What are the examples from India? – in a brief, succinct presentation on annualized learning cycles and assessments, **Isabel Sutcliffe** from Pearson suggested solutions in the larger interest of improving the state of education affairs in the future.

As she tried to answer these questions, she clearly outlined three major suggestions for the key stakeholders – one, assessments for better teaching strategies (for educators), two, assessment of higher order thinking skills (HOTS)

rather than textbook/syllabi-based learning (for assessors) and three, ascertaining education health and standardizing all across (for policy makers).

Isabel's shared some good ideas on teaching for understanding. Some of these included – encouraging application-based learning and evaluation, helping master higher order thinking skills, carrying out regular classroom-based assessments to track students' progress, using standardized assessments designed to measure learning skills and outcomes and providing feedback on learning gaps of the student and batch analysis for schools and teachers.

She concluded by saying, "To be a good teacher, you have to be a good assessor as well. Also, it is important to make use of the assessment as much as possible".

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Meeta summarized the session sharing the possibility of a complete dissolution of classrooms in the future. She added, "Learning will quintessentially be with sharing. There has to always be a cohort – learning can't be led." With this, she opened the floor for questions and comments, important ones of which included:

1. Comment: "What are the incentives for teachers? How can we keep them motivated? How do we hold them accountable? People who can't do anything in India choose to teach." – a participant
2. Comment: "People don't understand the consequences of what they are trying to accomplish." – Aditi
3. Question: "We are talking about Student First! The rights-based approach, where you are actually taking feedback from parents, is however, missing. Why can't the students be involved in creating the lesson plan and content? Why are we not asking children on how they are being or should be taught?" – Aditi
  - a. "We need to start focusing on fundamentals. Rights-based approach is important – all RTR libraries are being managed by children. Books are color-coded for learning abilities, again by children. We are also trying to understand about children's favorite authors and so on. Children in Mumbai don't know the importance of the National Anthem – they just get up in the movie halls because it is compulsory." – Umesh Brahme
4. Comment: "There's room to read, which is shrinking. But there's no time to read." – a participant from NISA
  - a. "We have advocated so much with the government for a reading period assigned to schools. Merely talking about reading without developing a habit is of no use." – Umesh Brahme
5. Comment: "We have used 'scripted' just as a way to describe the lesson plan – one needs training and good leadership for teachers to create their own lesson plans. Expecting every teacher to be a good researcher, a good lesson-plan maker and a good executor is asking for too much! The intention is not to templatize the whole world. It is rather to train and develop the teacher. Exposing someone to elite, usurp ideas from the West doesn't work; what children need is what does." – Ashish Rajpal
  - a. "I have seen many schools which have teachers talking to students before every class/session and gather classroom feedback." – participant Executive Teacher
6. Comment: "Excitement comes in when one experiments. Teachers with a fire in the belly have been excited. They have got on to the journey of seeking alternatives, looking for better alternatives. Democratization of the education system also has an important role to play in the sector. Abilities, experience, skills and heart in the right place – people with such attributes have to be given the liberty to them." – Vibha Parthasarathy
7. "We are essentially at the first step of the ladder, the value spectrum. Fundamentally, however, reading is very important." – Umesh Brahme

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Session 3

### Action Plan 2025 – Rethinking Policy

Detailed participative discussions on the vision for education 2025 and the strategy to achieve it brought the house to the obvious question – can the current education policy framework of India deliver on these ideas? The last session of SCNC 2013 aimed at understanding the current policies that India has in place, their implications for the education space and the gaps in the system, with an emphasis on the need to focus more on outcomes than inputs in education.

Shekhar Shah (from National Council of Applied Economic Research) moderated this interesting session which comprised of Karthik Muralidharan (from University of California), Ramya Venkataraman (from McKinsey and Company) and Amit Kaushik (from Ab Initio Consulting).

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Putting forward findings from his latest research titled '*The Aggregate Effect of School Choice: Evidence from a Two-stage Experiment in India*' conducted in Andhra Pradesh, Karthik Muralidharan made a strong case for school choice and budget private schools.

Karthik argued that the RTE Act is not about the right to education, but about the right to education facilities and inputs. Through quick slides on his presentation, he shared two highly controversial implications of the study – one, there is a substantial increase in the share of students attending private schools and paid for by public funds, and two, there is a significant reduction in socio-economic stratification in schools. He brought to the platform the nuances for implementing clause 12 (the 25% quota reservation clause) under RTE to the fullest potential and touched upon both research findings and policy implications.

Karthik said that the clause 12 is a great opportunity and could be a rare example of a policy that improves equity and efficiency and also does so at a lower cost than the status quo. However, he also added that it needs to be implemented carefully and well in a transparent and systematic way, to be seen as a real opportunity to improve both equity and efficiency.

He shared the findings from the Andhra Pradesh study and shared that – one, private schools are poorer on measures of input-quality, but much better on measures of school processes, two, private schools are more productive (but arguably not more 'effective' in improving basic competencies), and three, private schools are substantially more productive, and operate at less than one third the average cost per child of public schools.

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Ramya Venkataraman from McKinsey and Company talked about the role of partnerships in the education of the future. Presenting on 'Relevant Policies for School Education Reform', she said that the work is mostly based on a trial and error approach. She emphasized that it is not about public vs private but about a way to get the best of both and design a system that delivers better results.

She explained how all the possible ways of educating underprivileged children – government schools, government-aided schools, affordable private schools (RTE non-compliant as well as RTE superimposed), donor-funded schools as well as elite private schools with 25% reservation in place – could actually benefit from public private partnerships (PPP).

Ramya touched upon common success factors (like funding, selection, autonomy, and outcome evaluation) to make PPPs work in India, and showed that they are in clear consistency with international examples. She also shared the example of Mumbai School Excellence Programme (SEP), which is a unique partnership between the government bodies (Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Maharashtra SCERT and Text Book Bureau), partnering with private and non-government education players (Naandi Foundation, Save the Children, Kaivalya Education Foundation and Educational Initiatives) with external funding and governance (from UNICEF and Michael and Susan Dell Foundation) and programme design and management (McKinsey and Company) support.

Ramya referred to some international research from PISA findings and made some meaningful policy recommendations for the central and state governments and the private players and donors.

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Moving back a little bit from the Right to Education Act and its specifics, Amit Kaushik from Ab Initio Consulting shared a few insights to give a broad view of the act. He quoted the National Commission's Kothari report of 1966, which said that the destiny of a nation is found in its classrooms.

Amit said, "Education systems have to periodically reinvent themselves. Jobs people do today are jobs that weren't even imagined 25 years ago – same is going to be with the jobs in 2025. We are trying to address things that are not predictable/clear at the moment." He exemplified through technology, which everybody talks about but doesn't really use at a mass level. Briefly talking about the need for moral/value education and application-based learning in the current education system, he also expressed that discussions around education policies miss the fact that the modern family is looking at linking education with skills and livelihoods (economic opportunities)

Amit also mentioned that out of the 1.3 million schools in the country, only 15% are private, which means that bulk of the education in the country is under government control. Comparing it to the outside world, he said, "World over, the governments are increasingly encouraging participation and support from private players in education. However, in India the government is antagonizing that. They are looking at ways to control private education".

He concluded saying unless we are willing to accept that education policy needs to encourage and support different types of educational initiatives – an umbrella approach for the policy – a policy that encourages active participation and investment in the education space, it is not going to work.

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The last session, which was rated to be the most interesting and thought provoking of the day, gathered some good insights and feedback from the participants. Selected ones include:

1. Question: "The change of medium from Telugu to English brought down results. How?" – Ravi Shanker, participant from Tamil Nadu
  - a. "You can randomize the voucher for children, but the school still stays the choice variable. The language issue is extremely complicated – politics, ethics and practice get going together. (1) early childhood literature research tells that it is better to teach in the vernacular (2) bilingual theory says English might create difficulty in the early days, but is better in the longer run. The elite language format in India has been the three language structure – English, Hindi and the vernacular." – Karthik Muralidharan
2. Question: "Private schools are functioning as well as the public schools, but at one-third of the cost. Does that not make them better?" – Pratik from CCS
  - a. "Evidence doesn't suggest that tripling the costs would translate into better learning outcomes." – Karthik Muralidharan
3. Question: "What are the three most important things that we should do in the next 10 years that allows us to get us a PISA rating that makes us one of the best 10 in the world?" – Shekhar Shah
  - a. "One, define a national vision for education, two, set up an education regulatory authority at the national and state level to look into various aspects, and three, encourage private for-profit investments in education." – Amit Kaushik
  - b. "One, launch a standard, third party national student learning outcome assessment, two, launch a large number of different kinds of PPPs – infrastructure, subsidized education etc. – and create an ecosystem for experimentation, and three, give a spur to ongoing in-service teacher development to certain initiatives like professional certification and other such things." – Ramya Venkataraman
  - c. "One, you can't ignore the government system (quoting Lant Pritchett): most of these things are not stuck at the policy level, but at the implementation level – we need to do good monitoring. We aren't a failing state, but a flailing state. There's a major gap in governance (for example, DEO's tenure is one year, and more than 50% seats are vacant), two, framework from Delhi that could be translated into states with a certain level of decentralized control, and three, we desperately need more research – to find out thoroughly what works and what doesn't." – Karthik Muralidharan
4. Question: "There are a large number of dropouts. What can we do about them?" – participant from Haryana
  - a. "Dropping out is a rational choice that the family/household makes. Research suggests that sitting in the class is rather de-energising for the children, with only 20% of them actually getting any of it. There's no point keeping the child in a cage-like environment where he is not enjoying or learning." – Karthik Muralidharan
5. Question: "Will decentralization really work?" – Ravi Shanker, participant from Tamil Nadu
  - a. "Take the example of the New York City school reforms." – Ramya Venkataraman
  - b. "2005 RTE bill had two important provisions towards decentralisation– both of which were done away with: (a) Teachers would be a school based cadre – would not be transferred. (politicians opposed) (b)

Teacher salaries and leaves would be approved by SMC. In fact, it could also be subjected to minor penalties by the SMCs – a strong measure to ensure accountability (teachers opposed)” – Amit Kaushik

- c. “Decentralization has been there, say by SMCs, but it hasn’t been very empowering. If we can make it powerful, it will work wonders.” – Karthik Muralidharan
6. Question: “What about the process of policy formulation?” – Arvind Ilamaram from CCS
  - a. “We as a country, at least in pockets, have started to move towards broader, more participative policy making processes – trying to get people’s inputs. Involvement of expert groups and their inputs in policy formulation has started happening, albeit at a smaller level. For example, a local government official can change rules around teacher transfers.” – Ramya Venkataraman
7. Comment: “People don’t demand for change from the ground. Politicians/bureaucrats don’t respond to it because it isn’t asked for. If there’s a demand from the ground, will politicians respond to it like for roads, poverty, electricity?” – Satyanarayanan
  - a. “I agree. People aren’t really demanding it. Truth is, education has been on the political agenda only for the past 10 years. Maybe we need Annas and Kejriwals for education – on a serious note though, there’s greater awareness about the importance of education in the remotest parts of the country now. But yes, there’s not enough of a movement/demand for education.” – Amit Kaushik
  - b. “Unlike paani, bijli etc. the problem here is very much divided – people could go to the private schools if they do not like the government schools. Also, there’s a lack of a tangible thing to ask for – maybe infrastructure. But you couldn’t be possibly asking for tangible student learning outcomes?” – Ramya Venkataraman
8. Question: “How can we create a system that allows different people to learn at different levels? Why are we creating a bunch of mediocre people who are only able to read and write but not inquisitive enough about questioning anything around them? Homogenization and dumbing-down of education?” – Somnath Bandyopadhyay from CCS
  - a. “We (India and China) have come from a background where education was a selection and screening paradigm and not a development paradigm. It was not associated with skills or jobs, but with finding out the smartest ones and putting them in leadership positions. That has started changing but will take some more time.” – Karthik Muralidharan
9. Question: “Are there any successful models of PPPs other than Mumbai’s? – Sameena
  - a. “There are ample examples from examples from Punjab, Rajasthan, Mumbai, South Delhi, MHRD.” – Ramya Venkataraman

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**Closing remarks**

Harsh Srivastava from CCS did the closing remarks. Recapitulating the meaningful discussions and ideas shared over the day by people from all parts of the country, he said, “SCNC has become a point of reference for people interested in education policy in India.”

He thanked the panelists and participants for joining the SCNC 2013 and congratulated team CCS for a great show!

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Dinner talk

**Education 2025: eight building blocks**

In the dinner talk later, **Ashish Dhawan** from Central Square Foundation shared eight aspects that could become the starting points of education in the future.

1. Assessments: Assessments are a key portion of education. We should not shy away from participating in global assessments. Goals can't be set up without looking at an international benchmark, and therefore, we should participate in assessment studies like PISA and TIMSS. We should aim at being at least in the middle rankings in the next ten years.

2. Ratings: We should institute a national level assessment test (something like NAS) and have census-based assessments at the state and survey-based assessments at the national level. States should aspire to move up the

ladder in this ranking. Also, we should understand that student assessment is the bedrock of school assessment, and we should be able to give feedback to the parents.

3. Teacher Education: We need to seriously fix teacher education. The 13000 odd teacher education institutes in India are the worst public institutes in India. We need to shut down the bad ones and establish good institutes. The budget (investments in training and developing teachers, not salaries) should go up.

We can learn from China, which has only 66 dedicated universities for teacher education, one or two for every province.

4. Leadership: Teachers and principals account for 2/3rds of the school leadership. We could think of setting up a separate entity to impart training to and develop leadership abilities in teachers.

5. Early Childhood Education: While Delhi has started a kindergarten system (with 50,000 children against a need of around 250,000 seats at the moment), we need to make serious investments in early childhood education. RTE needs to extend downward to age 4, which is where compulsory schooling should begin.

Again, the China example with 95%+ school enrolment at age 4 is a good one!

6. Secondary School/Skills Education: Corporates and voluntary organisations could be involved in a big way in the secondary and skills education sector. Skilled, enthusiastic and committed manpower from the Corporate world could engage in designing curricula, sharing knowledge and imparting communication and soft-skills training to the young adults.

The example of Germany, which despite having the lowest college enrolment rate among developed nations, is still the powerhouse of Europe. Finland, China, Mexico and many other countries also benefit secondary school children with vocational and skills training from the Corporates.

7. Public-private partnerships (PPPs): We should promote more and more public private partnerships. In addition to making it easy for Corporates to come forward and work with the government, one should also start looking at the aided-school model as a PPP and slowly develop it into a great model of work.

8. Technology: We should befriend and exploit technology as much as possible. India still need 12 million teachers. It is only natural that we are not going to get that many great teachers. Therefore, we need to look into technology that could create personalised learning for every child. We need to rethink school design.

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